

Intro

We're on to the final day of Jesus' life. Sometime during Jesus' prayer at Gethsemane Friday began. The Jewish day begins at sundown not midnight. And the disciples were asleep indicating that it was late.

In his time of temptation, Jesus turned to prayer and resolves to obey the Father's will. Sometime around midnight on Friday Judas arrives and reveals Jesus to the religious authorities. Jesus is arrested secretly so as not to stir up the crowds.

We're in the middle of the night, likely sometime after midnight, when Jesus is brought to Caiaphas. Let's see what transpires.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Everything is going according to the divine plan as the crucifixion is being set in motion. Jesus is about to make atonement for our sins.

Point 1: Don't trample the truth

Explanation

After seizing Jesus, the Roman soldiers bring Jesus directly to Caiaphas ("the courtyard of the high priest" – 26:58) for a kind of impromptu, middle of the night, trial before the Sanhedrin. The word translated "council" in 27:59 is the Greek word for Sanhedrin.

Sanhedrin

The supreme religious, political, and legal counsel in Jerusalem. Handled legal disputes not settled by lesser courts. Held jurisdiction in Judea meaning when Jesus was in Galilee the Sanhedrin had no authority over him. In 6 AD jurisdiction over capital punishment (death penalty) was transferred to a Roman procurator, meaning the Sanhedrin had no authority to put Jesus to death (see John 18:31). The high priest was the president of the Sanhedrin. Composed of chief priests (mostly Sadducees), scribes (mostly Pharisees), and elders.

We see the high priest, scribes, elders, and chief priests gathered together to try Jesus for blasphemy. The gathering is premeditated, not spur of the moment. Judas was previously paid off by the chief priests (Matt 26:14-14). The Sanhedrin was already gathered, waiting for Jesus to be captured and brought in.

What stands out is how the Sanhedrin is looking for anything they can get against Jesus:

Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking false testimony against Jesus that they might put him to death, – 26:59

They wanted to arrest Jesus secretly (26:3-5), and previously they paid Judas to deliver Jesus in private (26:14-15). This wasn't going to be an impartial trial. No defense attorney. Their minds were made up. They

had to convince Pilate because they were under Roman authority and had no authority to execute the death penalty without Pilate's permission. They'd take whatever "evidence" they could get.

They struggled at first. They couldn't find any satisfactory testimony as "*many false witnesses came forward*" (26:60). After a period of unspecified time, two came forward with a charge that satisfied Caiaphas.

"This man said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.'" – 26:61

Perhaps a reference to John 2:19-21?

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. – John 2:19-21

These comments were made early on in Jesus' ministry, when he cleared the temple of money-changers a first time.

They misquoted him. He didn't say he would destroy Herod's temple. Someone else would. And the temple wasn't Herod's temple. Jesus was the temple. Jesus would resurrect himself after being crucified. That's what Jesus was claiming. Not that he would destroy Herod's temple. In those days destroying sacred sites like the temple was a capital offense. That's why the temple charge mattered.

When questioned, Jesus was silent. Fulfilling Isaiah 53:7.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. – Isa 53:7

The false charge sticks.

Application

What I want to highlight at this point is how **the truth was trampled**. Truth treated casually.

The problem is looking for the answers we want. And not caring how we get there.

The Sanhedrin was hardened. Resolved to destroy Jesus. No evidence. No act of compassion. No miraculous power. No sound argument could persuade them otherwise. Their minds were made up. They sought lies that would favor their verdict.

Sounds like our day? Truth-tellers aren't being put to death, but **people are looking for the answers they want**. Looking for whatever argument they can find. Generally people aren't searching for what is true. Generally people aren't looking for external standards, sources of authority, ultimate explanations, one grand story that gives shape and meaning to life. People are seeking to create their own reality. Meaning defined by the individual. I had a co-worker who found evolution freeing. With atheistic evolution, there's no God to whom we must give account so he's free to create his own meaning in life.

Judges puts it this way: "*Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*" (21:25). This is idolatry.

Illustration

People use religion this way. Don't like the thought of hell. I'll find a church or religion that doesn't believe in hell. Want to get drunk. I'll find a church or religion that's okay with my behavior. The Jesus of the Bible threatens this sort of human autonomy! Jesus was a threat to the Sanhedrin's power and autonomy.

People use the Bible this way. Want to believe everyone's going to heaven. I'll find a way to make the Bible fit. This phrase works. Forget about context and the meaning the author intended. This verse doesn't fit. I'll ignore that one. Or I'll make it say what I want.

Don't look for the answer you want. Look for the answer God gives. Conform your thoughts and your practice to the Bible. **Don't trample the truth.**

Point 2: Trampling the truth has consequences

Explanation

Caiaphas presses Jesus further.

"I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." – 26:63

Jesus responds:

"You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." – 26:64

"You have said so"

This could be translated "you said [it]" or "[it is as] you said".

Mark's account of Jesus' response reads, "I am" (14:62).

Luke account reads, "You say that I am" (22:70).

Jesus answers affirmatively while placing responsibility on Caiaphas. You said it with your mouth!

Caiaphas takes Jesus' response affirmatively. We know he isn't the Messiah so he's guilty of blasphemy. Worthy of the death penalty.

- 1) Jesus affirmed he was Messiah
- 2) Jesus allowed his followers to call him Messiah
- 3) Jesus claimed equality with God as future judge, the Son of Man

The Son of Man comment stems from Daniel 7:13-14.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. ¹⁴ And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. – Dan 7:13-14

Jesus says I am the Son of Man who will come from the clouds of heaven at the end of time to rule over a permanent, indestructible kingdom. All nations will one day serve me. In other words, one day I will rule over you and your rejection will be repaid!

Application

There's consequences for rejecting God's authority. No external standard leads to what we're seeing in the Ukraine. No external authority = free to do what's right in our own eyes. If Putin submitted himself to the Bible this invasion wouldn't be happening. It's that simple. Ukrainians wouldn't be suffering. Truth leads to real freedom. And human flourishing. People are suffering because **truth is trampled.**

On the other hand, we have what the world doesn't have. We have what the world needs. We have a grand story that makes sense of the world we live in. We have a grand story that gives shape and meaning to life! We have answers for humans wallowing in sin and suffering. We know the condition. We know the antidote.

Where history is going? The reign of Christ. Sinners from all nations rescued and redeemed on account of the substitutionary death Matthew about to detail. Curse reversed. The end of partisan politics. The end of racial divides. The end of military invasions. Every wrong righted.

The future triumph of Jesus calls us to live for the values of that future kingdom today. A kingdom that will last.

Gospel

God created us and therefore has jurisdiction over us.

We rebel and reject his authority and subject ourselves to divine judgment.

In the narrative Jesus is about to die to rescue us from our rebellion.

How do we respond to God? In faith and repentance. Turning from rebellion to trust.

Jesus died as a substitute for rebellious sinners such that whoever repents and believes will be forgiven and reign with Jesus in his coming kingdom.

Point 3: Truth trampers shame Jesus' followers

Explanation

At the same time Jesus is on trial, Peter is experiencing a trial of his own.

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. – 26:69

Outside Caiaphas' courtyard (26:58). Matthew shares Peter's experience as he witnesses Jesus on trial. Peter was questioned about his affiliation with Jesus three times.

First, a servant girl links Peter to Jesus. *"You also were with Jesus the Galilean"* (26:69). They're not alone. Peter denies association *"before them all"* (26:70) = this isn't just a private conversation. Evidently being with Jesus isn't perceived as a good thing. They're at Caiaphas' place. Peter wilts under pressure and denies association with Jesus. Perhaps he feared he'd be punished too?

Second, another servant girl outs Peter, telling bystanders: *"This man was with Jesus of Nazareth"* (26:71). Peter denies Jesus with greater intensity, making an oath: *"I do not know the man"* (26:72). An oath declared, "I am telling the truth." And called on God to bring judgment if a lie was made.

Third, the bystanders accuse Peter. *"Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you."* If someone from Boston or Alabama was here today we'd be able to recognize it. The bystanders could tell Peter was Galilean based on his accent. **Being one of them isn't a good thing!** Peter denies a third time, invoking a curse upon himself. The rooster crows. What Jesus said has happened. Peter's devastated.

And he went out and wept bitterly. – 26:75

Time wise, the rooster crowing indicates daybreak, the time when the sun begins to rise. The trial went on overnight.

Shame culture

Peter was guilty by association. Shamed because he associated with Jesus. Have you ever felt this way?

America has become a shame culture. By shame culture I mean:

- 1) A culture in which our identity is determined by public perception of us
- 2) A culture with a high emphasis on preserving honor and avoiding disgrace
- 3) A culture where behavior, thought, and affiliation is regulated by fear of being shamed

Shame culture existed in my grandparent's generation. Think the dunce cap. Up until the 1950's school children who caused a ruckus or didn't pay attention had to wear the pointy dunce cap while sitting or standing on a stool. A disciplinary method that utilized shame to prevent class disruption.

In my grandparents' day neighbors knew neighbors and everyone knew each other. Parents were careful to keep their children in line lest their children's behavior shamed them.

Shame culture gave rise to self-expression. Expressive individualism where each individual is free to define their own way of doing life, their own morality. No need for external standards like God and the Bible. Shame culture gave way to tolerance.

Interestingly individualistic self-expression has given rise to shame culture once again. In the quest to tolerate everything, tolerance has given rise to shaming those who don't celebrate freedom from eternal standards like the Bible.

Partisan politics uses shame instead of thoughtful and respectful dialogue. Labels like intolerant, bigot, on the wrong side of history, extremist, fundamentalist, snowflake, etc. mark public debate. Social media allows people to get away with hateful speech that one couldn't say to a person face to face. Labels are used, not arguments. Your position is reprehensible. Not your position is untrue.

This is why you experience challenges with your children or grandchildren or even great-grandchildren when discussing spiritual matters. They have a different worldview. Expressive individualism. Christianity is seen as restrictive and even shameful. We need to help them see truth is better than autonomy. Truth is better than self-expression.

Guilt by association

We live in a culture where some truths about God, morality, the afterlife, etc. are considered shameful. A God who makes demands on our lives and holds us accountable doesn't fit well with individualistic self-expression! It's guilt by association with the Bible's values.

There's a kind of unspoken rule that there's some things that we're not allowed to have an opinion on. Meaning there's no room for the truth. We're labeled and made to feel guilty for our values. Like Peter, we may feel intimidated to publicly declare our affiliation with Jesus. We become "one of them." Not a good thing. We feel shame for not meeting people's expectations of what our beliefs and values should be.

Caution: your pressure may be more imagined than real.

Point 4: A forgiving Savior

Explanation

Matthew doesn't tell us what became of Peter. John does (John 21:15-19). After resurrecting the temple, himself, Jesus questioned Peter. "Do you love me?" And he gave Peter two commands: "Feed my sheep" and "follow me."

Jesus wasn't done with Peter. He didn't cancel Peter because he failed. Jesus probed Peter's heart, questioning his commitment. And called him to move forward. In other words, Jesus forgave and restored Peter for wilting under pressure. Then sent him back to work.

More could be said but let's not use this as proof fallen pastors should be restored immediately. Peter simply wilted in one case, failing to identify himself as Jesus' disciple. Think of yourselves failing to share the gospel when you should because of pressure. Not taking a biblical stand when questioned about a divisive issue. Not hardened, disqualifying rebellion or character defects that require removal.

Application

How can we fight shame and peer pressure? What's the answer in a truth trampling, shame culture?

- 1) Remember Jesus reigns at the end of time
- 2) Remember Jesus' heart towards you

The culture shames us with guilt by association. Jesus welcomes us despite our unfaithfulness.

Do you want the approval of those who shame and bully you? Or the approval of the one who died for you and bears patiently with your failure?

- 3) Find your identity and acceptance in Christ

Redeemed, reconciled, forgiven, adopted, born again, follower, learner, etc.

- 4) Lean on the Lord's strength as you walk with him

Watch and pray.

Conclusion

Don't trample the truth. Reject human autonomy. Let's not trample the truth ourselves.

Trampling the truth has consequences. Remember Jesus returns.

Truth trampers shame Jesus' followers. Don't be shocked.

A forgiving Savior. Follow the one who forgives. Cling to the truth.